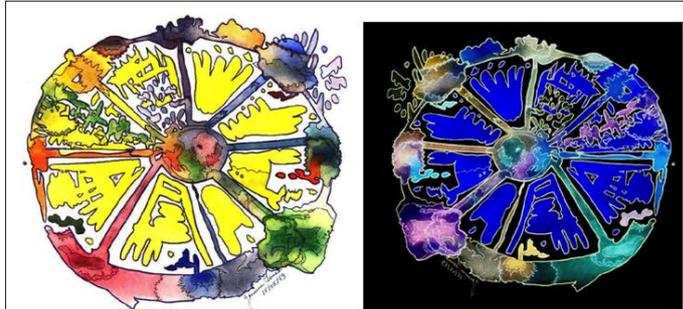


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TAD (Thoughts About Dementia) Newsletter
By: Dr. Gemma M. M. Jones



TAD 74 28 Oct., 2021

The 'Ten plus communication options model' for dementia care
Option 7 – Social responses

Related ideas for observations, reflection, and research

- Do you recall a time when someone has made you feel comfortable or helped you to pass the time by starting up some social conversation?
- Do you find it easy to start this sort of conversation?
- Have you seen people with dementia seem pleased to join in social chit-chat?
- Have you also seen examples where people were *not* comfortable doing so?

Dear Reader,

This TAD introduces **Communication Option 7**, 'social response', in the 'Ten-plus communication options model' for dementia care. (See the previous TAD newsletters for details of the models and options one to six ¹⁻⁷.) **Box 1** gives a brief summary of the model.

Box 1 Summary of the 'Ten plus communication options model' (Jones, 1985)

- 1 **Gather information**; ask 'good' questions to find out about the person's story
 - 2 **Orient** the person to what's happening, explain 'the facts'
 - 3 **Reminisce**
 - 4 **Distract**, directly and indirectly
 - 5 **Agree**; play along with
 - 6 **Lie** – told to make a person feel better, but a lie none the less
 - 7 **Social response**; superficial, safe topics
 - 8 **Validate** (acknowledge) the person's feelings
 - 9 **Idle**, stall for 'thinking' time; remain quiet; repeat last thing person said
 - 10 **Combinations** of the above options - used consecutively
- Plus Humour (with provisos), and other options**

Note that '**becoming defensive**' and '**trying to show the person you are right, and they are mistaken**' are NOT options in this model.

This option doesn't need much saying about it – it's about the type of social banter that we use daily – equally so with friends and strangers.

This sort of conversation is superficial (that word is not meant negatively, it's just that the topics aren't 'deep or heavy'), and that makes it (relatively) socially safe. It tends to involve topics that most people know something about, are exposed to on the news, and is talking about.

Brits are lucky – they are internationally famous for speaking (moaning) about the weather, and for finding a reason to have a cup of tea, as a frequent part of their repertoire of conversation. That is very useful 'social coinage'. And like almost everyone else - they also discuss sports, the latest government-related mishap, scandals involving celebrities, and current media topics. Such conversation has the purpose of initiating and encouraging a social exchange.

Match your social conversation to a person's memory abilities

You can use different types of chit-chat to match a person's memory abilities. (See the TAD 59⁸ on the Bookcase model if you're not familiar with the difference between factual, emotional, and sensory types of memory).

Using 'fact-related and time-related news' in conversation relies on a person having the information stored in memory that such they can *recognize* a topic enough to understand it if it comes up in conversation - even if though they may not always be able to recall the information spontaneously. (This usually applies to people in Behavioural Stage 1 who have intermittent memory difficulties.) Such conversation tends to get the "Oh yeah, I heard something about that", response.

Be aware that some people may become flustered or defensive if they don't recall a topic; they can be embarrassed that it shows up their cognitive struggles. Most people, however, just admit that they hadn't heard about the topic, or don't remember it, and participate in the conversation as best as possible. People can contribute and still feel included even with making general comments (or platitudes) that fit in almost anywhere, such as – "*Well, this is it you see.*", or, "*That's what I always say.*"

Since people in Behavioural Stage 2 (permanently disoriented in time), cannot readily learn 'facts'; they can have difficulty speaking about current events - unless they mistake them for similar past events. **Speaking about what you both can see or experience happening 'right now'**, in this moment, is a helpful thing to do when communicating in a social, light-hearted way. "*Look at the sun on the lawn. I wonder how long that will last? Do you feel like going outside for a walk today? See the gardener raking all those leaves? Sure hope he gets some help – that's a lot of work.*"

People need more than just social, superficial conversation

Social conversation is fine - unless that's the only way that a person is being spoken to throughout the day, and day after day.

We all have the need to have our feelings acknowledged (especially the uncomfortable ones like fear, anger, sadness), and to speak about serious things (to question the meaning of our lives) - from time to time. We all need to speak, sometimes, with our own life-experience and life-questions as a reference point.

I am reminded of a conversation I heard, long ago, between a caregiver and a gentleman with dementia. It went something like this:

Caregiver: *"It's such a lovely day out. The trees are getting their blossoms, the daffodils are up, and the squirrels are chasing about. It's so cheery. Don't you just love springtime?"*

Gentleman: *"Well it isn't springtime for me right now; I want to talk about that."*

That's a fitting example to end with since the next TAD newsletter will be on communication option 8, 'validate, acknowledge feelings'.

In the meanwhile,
Best regards,

Gemma Jones

References

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